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## SHOULD THE BIBLE BE A REQUIRED OR AN ELECTIVE STUDY IN OUR COLLEGES?

BY REV. CHARLES B. CHAPIN.

In answering this question the writer is not speaking for his college, but simply for himself. He is giving his own individual views for which he alone is responsible, after some experience in teaching work.

Nor is he claiming that his branch is the most important of all. Of course, in order to be successful, every teacher should be an enthusiast in his special department, regarding it as second to none in the college curriculum. This the writer does with reference to the Bible, but he would not for a moment be unjust or unfair to the other courses of college study.

His conviction—and it is growing stronger every day—is that the Bible should be a required study, and if he had his way there would be a course for each of the four years of college life, the aim being in this period of time to cover the entire Bible in a suggestive and at the same time a thorough way, and of course with the use of every safe modern help.

And for this five reasons may be given:

*First*, because of the effect upon character produced by Bible study.

During the formative period of college life characters are being built up one way or the other. It is truly the decisive period of life, for, as a rule, as students graduate from college will they continue to the end. And there is no one book calculated to build up character as the Bible. All other books combined cannot equal it in this respect. And is not this an important part of education, i. e., not simply the acquirement of knowledge, not simply mental equipment, but character building? Hence during each of the four years the Bible should be so taught as to effect this result. Of what other college study can this be said with equal truth?

*Second*, because of the general ignorance of the Bible upon the part of college students. If the truth were generally known, as

it is known by college professors of Biblical Literature, many would be amazed at the disclosures. In an examination of candidates for public school teachers in a western city the question was asked, "Who wrote the Sermon on the Mount?" One said "Woodrow Wilson," another, "Lloyd George," and another "one of the English poets." This would be funny if it were not so serious.

And at one time in his teaching experience the writer was told by one of his students that she had never heard of Deuteronomy, and she was a member of the church and had been brought up in a Christian family.

Rev. Dr. Walter W. Moore, President of the Union Theological Seminary at Richmond, Virginia, tells "of the astounding ignorance of the Scriptures displayed by certain bodies of college students found by President Thwing in one of the most prosperous and progressive parts of our country, when examined as to the meaning of various allusions in the great and most popular of contemporary poets to some of the most familiar incidents of Biblical history. Twenty-two quotations from Tennyson's poems, containing references to the commonest passages of Scripture were given to a body of young college men and a body of young college women, and they were asked to explain these allusions. They evinced almost incredible ignorance. Out of the thirty-four men, eleven had never heard of the 'Manna in the wilderness;' only two had ever heard of the shadow turning back on the dial for Hezekiah's lengthening of life; twenty-two did not know who 'Baal' was; nineteen had never read the exquisite idyl of Ruth; twenty-eight knew nothing of 'Joanah's gourd.' Some of the answers were positively startling. With the men only forty-three per cent of the questions were answered correctly, and with the women forty-nine per cent."

In explanation of the above it must be remembered that parents do not instruct their children in the Bible as in the olden days, but leave it to the teachers in the Sunday School; and every one knows the superficial and unconnected method of Bible teaching in the average Sunday School, given as a rule by untrained teachers and with only a half hour a week at their disposal.

The conclusion to which we are forced is this: That the Bible must be learned and studied, if at all, in college, for if not studied then it will in most cases be imperfectly known, for it has been studied little before college and will not be studied in after life. Could a stronger reason be given for making it a required college study?

*Third*, because it represents the highest literature. As simple literature the King James version is an unsurpassed, an unequaled classic. If other classics are required, why leave out one of the best; one, too, that has stood the test of centuries?

Very many are familiar with the incident of Benjamin Franklin and the Atheist Club, when he represented our country overseas, but it illustrates the case in point. When asked to bring and read some piece of literature, he chose the Book of Ruth. As he finished reading that exquisite story, they exclaimed, "How beautiful! How chaste! How unique! Where did you find that gem?" "From the very book you are condemning but have never read—the Christian Bible," he replied. And there it is. We claim that the study of such literature as literature should be a component and essential part of every college student's education.

*Fourth*, because the Bible suggests the only solution for the great and grave problems of the day. Never has our country been confronted with such problems and they are even more acute and critical in Europe and Asia. The problem of the rich and poor, of capital and labor, of marriage and divorce, of war, and peace, are responsible for the rapid and alarming growth of Socialism and Bolshevism. Unless these problems are solved, only God can tell what will happen to our land and what the future of European and of world civilization will be. And our students are going out into the thick of this fight, for fight it is; and our girls as well as our boys, for with citizenship thrust upon them they must do their part to meet the crisis.

But where do we find the solution? In Socialism? No. In Bolshevism? A thousand times, no. In expert scientific knowledge and training along social service lines? No, and yes. If this latter is separated from religion, it will produce no permanent results, but if carried on in the spirit of Christ and with the appli-

cation of His social teachings, we can look forward to the future with confidence and hope.

In short, the social teachings of the Bible as given by the prophets and especially by Jesus Christ suggests the only cure, the one solution. It is perfectly amazing to one who sees and realizes it for the first time how Jesus nearly two thousand years ago in His teachings and preaching laid down principles that are wonderfully applicable to every problem of the twentieth century.

How then can a college student's education be complete without such a required course of study?

*Fifth*, because of the lasting effect the Bible should have upon the student's life.

And here we would not be misunderstood, for we would not suggest even any invidious distinction. But is it not capable of proof that Bible study stays with a student, or should stay, longer than any other kind of study? All our college branches are chosen for the mental training and equipment they give, and just so far are they permanent in their influence, but as studies they are seldom continued after graduation. Others are accomplishments, desirable and educative in a way, but in most cases they are not continued when the cares of home, of business, or profession crowd in in after life. But Bible study should always be continued, not necessarily carried on as literature in a critical or scholarly spirit, but in a spiritual and practical way as a necessary help to character building. Indeed it is perhaps more important then than at any previous time, because the temptations and distractions of life are afterwards multiplied, as well as the opportunities for exerting an influence for God and for good.

Thus, as we see it, the college is the place of all places for giving our young people a real love for the Bible, a knowledge of its contents, and methods of study to be continued through the years; indeed, if what has been said above be true, it is practically the only place. And so the professor of Biblical Literature is building for future generations as no other teacher is.

This, at least, is the vision of the writer. He has had some experience as a preacher and a pastor, but he has come to feel that in teaching the Bible to the future home-makers of the South he is doing the most important and far-reaching work of his life. And this can and should be the vision of every college Bible teacher.